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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org.* All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

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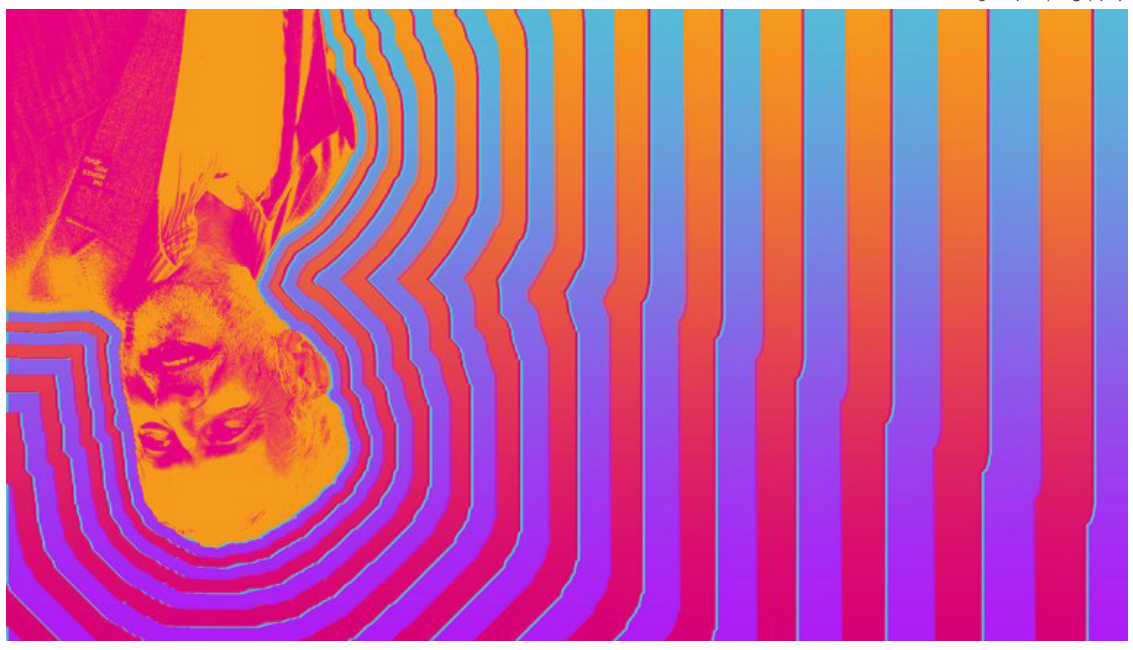
Forgetting Mark Fisher

Efraim Carlebach



Acid Corbynism?

"My whole lifetime, every time you think the Left has got somewhere, the Right is one step ahead of it."[1] – Mark Fisher (1968-2017)

MARK FISHER WAS OFTEN ASKED what "capitalist realism" is. His most interesting answer was that it is "a pathology of the Left."[2] This cut against other definitions of his oft-used concept, which identified it with "neoliberalism." What ties the two together is implied in the subtitle to his 2009 book – *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* – alluding to Margaret Thatcher's infamous assertion, "There is no alternative" (TINA). Fisher thought the Left, in its pathology, had capitulated to neoliberalism, and thus to capitalism. This raises the question of whether the end of neoliberalism will mean the end of capitalist realism, and even the end of capitalism.

In 2009, as the financial crisis heralded a putative return to "Socialism" or "Marx," Fisher was circumspect. "[W]hile neoliberalism was necessarily capitalist realist, capitalist realism need not be neoliberal. In order to save itself, capitalism could revert to a model of social democracy or to a *Children of Men*-like authoritarianism. Without a credible and coherent alternative to capitalism, capitalist realism will continue" (78). He accepted neither model, because he was aware of how changes in capitalism had wrong-footed the Left before – indeed, "*every time*." But in 2016, when the political crisis of neoliberalism was unavoidable, Fisher changed tone: "Corbyn might be crushed, but I think we can be confident... there is a new wave and we can now start to ride it towards post-capitalism."[3] He thus implies that post-neoliberalism will entail the end of "capitalist realism," even the end of capitalism – despite his earlier premonition about its continuation through change under "a model of social democracy."

This change in Fisher's thought between 2009 and 2016 has two features: his shift from a critique of the 60s New Left to an embrace of the counterculture as "acid communism," and his shift from a critique of (neo-)social democracy to Corbynism. What accounts for these shifts? Why does he drop his critical detachment? Is it because the crisis and transformation of neoliberalism has really led to the emergence of "a credible and coherent alternative to capitalism," or because that transformation is actually being led by Trump and Brexit in a way that the Left cannot countenance? Fisher's unfinished and unpublished blog "The Manneguin Challenge,"[4] written a week after Trump's election and two months before Fisher's death, suggests the latter. There he dismisses Trump and Brexit as just the intensification of "a strategy that has served the right well for forty years," and blames the masses' nostalgia for Empire. But the shock for the Left in 2016 doesn't account for why his perspective was susceptible to such a collapse in the first place. To address that, we must investigate the theoretical framework of *Capitalist Realism*.

The core of Fisher's theoretical framework has been summarized best by Nick Land in a blog post titled "Precursors."[5] There Land quotes extensively from the famous passage in *The Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels describe how "[t]he bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part": "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations...revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society... All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned." Land simply comments: "If Marx and Engels had systematically substituted 'capitalism' for 'the bourgeoisie' in this passage, its accelerationist credentials would have been vastly upgraded."

In one sentence, Land has succinctly pinpointed why accelerationism, in both its so-called left and right varieties, differs fundamentally from Marx in its understanding of capitalism and history, and in so doing he has highlighted a fundamental problem with most so-called Marxism.

It is striking that Fisher makes the same substitution in *Capitalist Realism*. Quoting from the same passage in *The Communist Manifesto*, he removes "the bourgeoisie" and inserts 'Capital': "[Capital] has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies..." etc. (4).[6] Whereas for Marx, the emergence of bourgeois society – when "freedom dawned on the world," as Hegel said of Rousseau – was the revolutionary condition for the possibility of human emancipation, for Land and Fisher, it is an unfortunate 19th century myth, which they exorcise.

This elision of the bourgeois revolution leads to a quite different understanding of capitalism from that of Marx. For Marx, capitalism was not identical with the bourgeois revolution and the emancipation of social relations based on labor. Rather, capitalism is the fundamental crisis and self-contradiction of bourgeois society in the industrial revolution of the 19th century: a new historical contradiction, in which labor was undermining its own value. This is not the same as saying, as Fisher does, that "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics." (4)

Eliding bourgeois society from Marx's account of history and capitalism leaves Fisher with a flat theory of history, in which capitalism is simply the destruction of belief systems, cultures and what he calls "lifeworlds." To confirm his reading of Marx, Fisher prominently cites Badiou, who shares this elision of bourgeois oppression, missing Marx's historically specific claims.[8]

Fisher uses this theory of capitalism to explain "capitalist realism," or why there seems to be no alternative. Because capitalism is just the desacralization of all culture, reducing it to a "system of equivalence," we regard everything with an ironic detachment, as a "consumer-spectator," severely hampering our ability to be motivated around a political alternative to capitalism. This means that any alternative to capitalism must come from outside this process. This is where Badiou's transhistorical "communist hypothesis" comes in handy, as a tendency that appears to transcend the two temporalities of pre-modern "lifeworlds" and capitalism.

But doesn't the existence of a Left, however weak, belie such a strong claim about capitalism destroying any alternative? On the contrary, Fisher thinks the Left (c.2009) is both cause and effect of "capitalist realism." He argues that the Left's "actual aim was not to replace capitalism but mitigate its worst excesses." (14) The Left fetishized its own failure, retreating to concerns about "ethical immediacy" and "diversity" (16), and "endlessly repeatling] older gestures of rebellion and contestation as if for the first time" (9), masking a "morose conservatism" (78).

Fisher traced this "pathology" of the Left to what he saw as the 60s New Left's misunderstanding of capitalism. He argues that they took capitalism to be a form of authoritarian ideology, like a stingy father figure. However, because in Fisher's account capitalism is not an organized ideology in that way, but simply "what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration," such protests only served – here he follows Zizek – to project leftists' disavowal of capitalism harmlessly elsewhere. Post-ideological capitalism doesn't need you to believe in it; after all, it is the ironizing of all belief.

Following this rejection of capitalism as an organized ideology, Fisher goes on to argue that there is no necessity to how capitalism is structured: "As any number of radical theorists from Brecht through to Foucault and Badiou have maintained, emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a 'natural order', must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable" (16). Fisher bases this claim for "mere contingency" on his explanation of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of capitalism as deterritorialization and reterritorialization "on an *ad hoc* basis" (5).

A second consequence of Fisher's theory of capitalism and subsequent critique of the New Left is a rejection of any notion of subjectivity. Following Zizek, Fisher argues that because capitalism is just the ironizing of all belief, "the operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief" (12). This chimes with his anti-neoliberalism, arguing against personal individual responsibility, whether for one's own depression or for politics. Again, this follows from the

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unfamiliar procedures, she has sought the services of specialized care providers to ease her current moment of crisis. With the help of her psychiatrists, Global Economy actively works to identify and resolve the issues which led to her bleak diagnosis. She attempts to search out and identify problems within her own system to offer strategies for coping with or solving abstract issues. As depicted throughout *Self-Capital*, her labor includes not only yogic workouts, but also mental and linguistic exercises including decoding language to communicate clearly to a network of capitalist

Global Economy visiting her therapist. Self-Capital, *episode 1.*

constituents. For example, in Episode 2, Global Economy reads a series of capitalist terms out loud to herself to identify language that symbolizes unproductive components of the global economic system. When she recites and processes agreeable terms, she swallows them as if eating chocolates. When she recites and processes defective terms, her face puckers in disgust, until she ultimately ejects the words from her body by vomiting them out in the museum bathroom. In his essay "Affective Labor," Michael Hardt discusses a statement articulated by Robert Reich, arguing that labor practices that do not lead to material ends, but nonetheless involve laborious activity constitutes one face of immaterial labor. He says, "Robert Reich calls this type of immaterial labor 'symbolic-analytical services' – tasks that involve 'problem-solving, problem identifying, and strategic brokering activities.'"[15] This account of immaterial labor describes Global Economy's work to function.

Global Economy's two psychiatrists also illustrate the concept of immaterial labor through the lens of affective labor, that is, labor which "involves the production and manipulation of affects and requires (virtual or actual) human contact and proximity."[16] The in-person care provided to Global Economy, in the form of analysis, counseling, and instruction, is considered a valuable service, the end result of which is an intangible product that nonetheless produces capital. In a letter to her colleague, Global Economy's principle psychiatrist describes *relief* as the product of their service, stating, "My hope is that you can help *relieve* some of her inner turmoil so that she might at least, continue as she is."[17] The means through which Global Economy's relief is to be achieved includes a regiment of body-oriented and mental techniques designed to provoke a suspension of affectual transformation. However, their techniques do not endeavor to clarify the very real circumstances of Global Economy's systemic meltdown, but instead are only focused on addressing the emotions which are "speaking from the deepest parts of [her] body."[18] The doctors are providing a manufactured service which entails manipulating the individual subject's affectual nature and therefore the affectual nature of the entire global economy, fostering a community influenced by and embedded with information culled from experimental psychiatric therapies.

Gilligan's metaphor extends outside of the frame of the video into the contemporary landscape of 2008, wherein industry has shifted from a materialist production-based economy to an immaterial service and care-based economy in the form of social networks and consumer communities. The psychiatrists stand in for the service providers who labor to generate capital through affectual influence and Global Economy takes the position of the impressionable subject(s) who prefers a manufactured sense of ease, comfort, and well-being, rather than wallowing through her very own crisis. This relationship is not simply parasitic, wherein healthcare services maintain the status quo for an unhealthy and vulnerable subject, but it can also be terminal as Eric Cazdyn reminds us when he discusses the implications of treating socioeconomic symptoms without identifying the underlying illness. While arguing the dangers of prescriptive medicine, Cazdyn articulates the locus of health management services: "Prescriptive medicine begins with the axiom of health management: as long as illness is managed in the meantime, we do not have to worry about curing for the future. The prescriptive meantime becomes the permanent destination rather than a temporary moment of development. Control over the symptom is the gold standard, and even though the underlying illness is still understood as malignant, the management of the malignancy is now possible in new ways."[19] These "new ways" further illustrate how capitalist production takes advantage of new forms labor that only exist in response to management needs. In *Self-Capital* immaterial labor, in the form of affectual labor, represents how economic shifts generate the production of affective treatment and manipulation services in order to cope with destructive side-effects, specifically in times of crisis.

The allegorical framework of *Self-Capital* is established by a shared relationship between the financial crises occurring at both the ICA and the world-at-large. The lack of spatiotemporal distance between these simultaneously transpiring events – the failure of neoliberal capitalism in the form of the 2008 financial crisis and the represented metal breakdown of Global Economy – is balanced by the artist through clever dialogic and visual representation. However, several scenes within each of the three episodes emphasize the tension between the extreme present and the recent past, tilting Gilligan's carefully constructed balance and provoking the blurring of real and imagined contexts. In standard forms of allegory, the past and present and all the sociopolitical issues particular to each context are clearly defined, allowing for subjects to be emblematic rather than carry the weight of events as they transpire in real-time. In *Self-Capital*, everything and everyone is subject to the allegorical references depicted. The present moment is filtered and represented through its own construction.

Gilligan's framework draws attention not only to the financial situation occurring within the ICA that serves as the backdrop for the work, but also for the larger crisis occurring outside the institutional setting. Furthermore, Gilligan extends the allegorical device, creating a *mise en abyme* effect by giving the social body a somatic form within which the effects of the financial crises (plural) are represented as lingering affectual and emotional distress.[20] When we watch Global Economy struggle to articulate the underlying causes of her total collapse and meander through seemingly redundant therapeutic exercises, so too are the ICA and international governments implementing trial and error strategies. This lack of distance between actual events and those represented in the work pushes the allegorical work into strange territory wherein the cinematic 4th wall hangs in delicate balance; upheld only through the work's reliance on a professional cast, script, and technical elements such as lighting and sound design. In fact, Gilligan would eventually utilize these technical components to loosen the work from its parabolic condition.

Gilligan reveals the allegorical framework during the closing scenes of the final episode. At the start of the scene, Global Economy is seated in an office at a desk working to decode the bureaucratic language of an online state pension guide. She begins reading the pension forecast in a straight-forward manner but pauses on the word "estimate." On a piece of paper, she attempts to pen the word. She writes, "e-s-t-i-m-a" and then fumbles to list the remaining two letters, treating the language as coded symbols that denote mathematical functions rather than philological meaning. She writes, "e-s-t-i-m-a-l-o equals estimalo." Then, recognizing her failure to construct a coherent sequence of letters (symbols), Global Economy begins frantically dissecting words using arithmetic operations, creating mutilated terms that "sound right." The word "estimate" transforms into "Estinaop." The word "additional" transforms into "Acdiseot."[21] Global Economy's inability to read comprehend the language is mimetic in its depiction of the laymen attempting to read incredibly complex and circuitous governmental language, ironically constructed to make the information explicitly clear. Suddenly, the camera cuts away from Global Economy, as her struggle to decipher government language continues. The camera is directed outside of the ICA London, looking over the city's skyline. Here, the two temporalities collide; the world created within the framework of Gilligan's allegory, *Self-Capital*, and the outside world where the effects suffered by Global Economy are being played out in actuality. The metaphor lingers only through the Global Economy's continued reading. But as the lens scans the metropolitan horizon line, her voice fades out and the scene pauses on scaffolding that lines the museum's façade, which indeed needs repair. The image then cuts to black.

In her representations of the failure of neoliberal capitalism through the lens of the ICA London's fiscal problems and the wider 2008 financial crisis in her film *Self-Capital*, Melanie Gilligan offers critical insight into the construction of sociopolitical structures and ideologies which produce, maintain, and encourage the propagation of systemic failure as an effectual socioeconomic model to a disenfranchised and exhausted global population. Specifically, Gilligan's work highlights how affect is fostered and manipulated by constructs of neoliberalism to distract the social body from realizing the totalizing effects of the failed capitalist system. In the work, Global Economy is not simply struggling to self-regulate and provide self-care, she is also completely helpless in all her efforts to decode her ailments and communicate them to those who might offer systemic solutions. Locked in a state of perpetual illness, Global Economy struggles around the clock to implement corrective measures in the face of a terminally ill economic system. This situation

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What does it mean to say that Platypus is the psychoanalyst of the Left?

Omair Hussain

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY that Platypus is the psychoanalyst of the Left? Thinking through this analogy can provide some clarity about the Platypus project and its relationship to the existing Left.

Freud never had a prescriptive conception of health. In fact, for Freud, mental health existed on a spectrum, and was not a difference in kind. In other words, for Freud, the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy psyche was not a difference in two kinds of psyches, but a difference in how the psyches expressed degrees of mental illness on a spectrum. There is no sharp line of division between health and illness, but only a spectrum of gradations. Freud did not have a predetermined concept of health, but recognized that we were all healthy and unhealthy at the same time, and that this expressed itself in symptoms to varying degrees. For Freud, we are all neurotic, repressed, and pathological. The question is, to what degree?

If Platypus is the psychoanalyst of the Left, then the Left's health or illness must be conceptualized the same way. The Left is not ill according to a pre-established idea of health, or according to some abstract schema used to measure its vitality. There is no sharp line dividing the Left's illness from its health, its death from its previous life or its potential rebirth. Platypus has no predetermined idea of what a truly living, healthy Left would look like. That is why to say that the Left is dead is not simply a moral condemnation of the existing Left for failing to meet abstract criteria of being "healthy" or "alive." Rather, the Left is ill or dead according to its own history, in relation to what it once was and what it imagined itself to be. Perhaps this is far from self-evident, at least for the Left. For Freud, the point of psychoanalysis was not to simply declare to the patient that they are ill, to get the patient to recognize objective truth outside of their subjectivity, or to provide answers for their health, but instead to engage in a process where the patient comes to recognize and become self-conscious of their own illness. We have no prescription for what ails the Left. All we can do is work through the symptoms of this illness.

Thus, it is important to note that the different phases in the Platypus project are not marked by Platypus's own preoccupations, or by what we think the Left should be talking about. Rather, our phases are marked by the historically shifting symptoms expressed by the Left itself, the patient's own preoccupations. In demarcating different phases in Platypus, we are merely trying to objectify the different orientations and positions the Left has taken in the last decade, which are the most acute symptoms expressing the Left's illness.

This should be kept in mind when addressing the latest phase in Platypus, the "Socialist Turn." The rise of "socialist" rhetoric and sentiment on the Left seems to many a sign of optimism, an expression of the Left's growth, an expression of a potential new life for Leftism and Socialism. Platypus sees things differently. We recognize that the Left's changing preoccupations, like the return of "Socialism" we are seeing now, are only different symptoms expressing the death of the Left.

However, like Freud, we have to address these symptoms as neither inevitable nor unchangeable, as neither unreal nor merely "subjective", as something more than simply a product of the patient's own delusions. We must deal with these symptoms as a very real product and constituent of objectivity, but also as changeable, as something that can be overcome.

This is what we mean when we say in Platypus that the existing Left might be an obstacle to Socialism. Its solutions to the problem are the symptoms of its irrelevance. They themselves express the problem.

But there is no way around this. We are all expressions of the problem, to a more-or-less self-conscious degree. If Rosa Luxemburg was accurate in her prognosis one-hundred years ago that the choice was between Socialism and Barbarism,[1] then we must concede that the last one-hundred years of social life have been barbaric. We are a product of the Counterrevolution. We are all expressions of a barbaric world. We all express symptoms of a world without a Left.

The question is, what to do about it? Faced with a similar situation of barbarism in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin wrote in "Experience and Poverty," "Barbarism? Yes, indeed. We say this in order to introduce a new, positive concept of barbarism."[2] What would it mean to recognize the positive aspect, the potential, of our barbaric moment? It would mean registering how this barbarism could be transformed, on the basis of the barbarity itself. There is no way around, but only through.

The problem with the Millennial Left is that it does not take the progressive character of barbarism seriously enough. It does not take the progressive character of the barbaric present seriously enough. It expresses moral outrage at the world as it is, with no real prospects of changing it. It affirms its own impotence as a criterion for "correct" ideology.

And yet the world changes. The Left is content in expressing outrage at the character of these changes that seem to happen from "above" without recognizing how their own discontents are bound up with these changes.

The recent "Socialist Turn" is an expression of the Left's fundamental inability to deal with changes that happen in capitalism. Socialism in this context is framed as anti-capitalism, as "resistance" to the powers that be. In other words, Socialism means resisting Trump. Socialism means resisting the changes that are being brought about in society. Socialism is no longer an expression of the desire for the new or different, but instead a desire for a return to an imagined more equitable status quo.[3]

As Chris Cutrone put in a recent article in the *Platypus Review*, "The Millennial Left was not defeated by Bush, Obama, Hillary, or Trump. No. They have consistently defeated themselves. They failed to ever even *become* themselves as something distinctly new and different, but instead continued the same old 1980s *modus operandi* inherited from the failure of the 1960s New Left."[4]

The Millennial Left's lack of historical self-consciousness spells its doom. It repeats history without recognizing it. It remains tethered to past moments in the grim history of the defeat of the Left, without self-awareness about this fact.

The Millennial Left did not point a way forward out of the dead-end projects of the New Left and Postmodernism, but rather inherited and naturalized these failed ideological enterprises with their limited political horizons as their intellectual backdrop.

The irony is that the Millennial Left thinks that its Socialism is something new, a Marxism 2.0, updated with the struggles of a plethora of oppressed identities previously neglected. Intersectionality is viewed as a novel concept. But perhaps the Millennial Left is not new enough. It unconsciously reproduces intellectual frameworks that were not only inherited from past moments in the history of the defeat of the Left, but that themselves were products of even earlier defeats. Historical regression means a continued inheritance of lower and lower political horizons and possibilities. The real tragedy is that this unconscious repetition of inheriting lowered political horizons is celebrated as the "new"!

The Millennial Left affirms this condition of lowered political horizons and possibilities. It rejoices in its own impotence. Politics is reduced to a question of abstract morality or ethics, or else expressions of identity. Socialism is reduced to a lifestyle, an alternative way of living, according to an abstract set of "socialist" principles. The question of actually fundamentally transforming the world is completely bracketed, because it is thought impossible.

Thus, the Socialist Turn, far from an expression of a renewed strength on the Left, is a symptom of the Left's continued helplessness and impotence in the face of circumstances that it has participated in creating, but that confront it as something foreign and alien.

This is the real pathology of the Left. It continually reconstitutes the domination it wants to overcome precisely on the basis of its discontents against this domination. What would it mean to overcome this pathology? Platypus has no answer. All we can do, like Freud, is attempt provoke recognition in the patient of its pathology. Freud's goal was to strengthen the ego of the patient through self-consciousness. If the patient could be made conscious of the pathology, perhaps that would point to its overcoming. We seek to incite the same kind of self-recognition and self-overcoming on the Left. Freud's goal was to increase the patient's freedom through self-mastery. Our goal is the same for the history of humanity. | **P**

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1 Rosa Luxemburg, Chapter 1 in *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis of German Social Democracy*, trans. Dave Hollis (Luxemburg Internet Archive, 2003), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/index.htm>.

2 Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty" in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, trans. Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2.2: 732. The article can be found online at <https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/benjamin_experience.pdf>. trans. Rodney Livingstone.

3 For example, I recently saw a meme that said FDR was a democratic socialist.

4 Chris Cutrone, "The Millennial Left is Dead," *Platypus Review* 100 (October 2017), <https://platypus1917.org/2017/10/01/millennial-left-dead/>.

"Forgetting Mark Fisher", cont. from page 1

Deleuzian framework he employs, in which capitalism is just the negation of all subjectively assumed belief.

In Fisher's conception of capitalism bourgeois society's emergence is just a ruse for capitalism's wanton destruction, collapsing all "beliefs" and "lifeworlds." Just as this approach projects postmodern irony back onto the history of capitalism, so too his anti-subject, anti-individual philosophy projects neoliberal "individualism" back onto bourgeois society. In "Democracy is Joy,"[9] Fisher argues that the subject, freedom and causality are just "superstitions." Like pre-modern superstitions, they are – in Fisher's Foucauldianism – a form of "secular power," only superficially different from "theocratic power." Kant's transcendental critique, Fisher argues, simply serves to prop up the fiction of the individual subject as the basis of the destructive "economy" of "capital," which "bent and melted the matter of this and every other world to fit its presuppositions – the greatest theocratic achievement in a history that was never human."

In trying to overcome neoliberalism's "individualism," Fisher accepts the neoliberal antinomy of "individual" and "collective," simply inverting it. Thus he writes, "When Thatcher said "there is no such thing as society," she was only echoing the assumptions of Hume and Smith." But Adam Smith was nothing if not a theorist of society per se, for whom through free exchange "society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society."[10] By embracing "mere contingency" and rejecting "subjectivity," it is Fisher, not Adam Smith, for whom "there is no such thing as society." Like Deleuze, Fisher takes up Spinoza as a solution, arguing that inserting oneself in this "naturalistic matrix of cause and effect" is the way to go "for human beings who want to move in the direction of love and freedom." This "naturalistic" determinism is the perfect flipside to "mere contingency." Like Badiou's "communist hypothesis" the abstract invocation of "love and freedom" elides bourgeois society as the basis for thinking the conditions for the possibility of change, and oscillates between contingency and necessity, voluntarism and determinism.

For Marx, the emergence of bourgeois society is crucial for grasping the theory of history and of capitalism. Capitalism is not, as Fisher has it, "what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration," but the self-contradiction of bourgeois social relations under conditions of industrial capital. In this sense, contra Fisher and Zizek, Marx think that capitalism does depend on some "subjectively assumed belief," namely the bourgeois consciousness of the working class demanding the value of its labor, which reproduces capitalism from below. Thus Marx sought to critically grasp how the working class, expressing the self-contradiction in its demand for its bourgeois right under conditions of industrial capital, could become conscious of the need to overcome itself – to abolish itself.

Fisher's assertion that the Left must show that everything is "mere contingency" raises the question of how a conscious subject could grasp reality such that it could be transformed. He reproduces the old antinomy of necessity and contingency, one-sidedly endorsing the latter. Marx registered this antinomy in response to the rise of Louis Bonaparte in 1848-52. Whereas for Victor Hugo, Bonaparte's rise to power was the contingent result of "the violent act of a single individual," for Proudhon, it was the expression of a necessary historical development. As Marx puts it, while for Hugo it was "like a bolt from the blue," Proudhon "falls into the error of our so-called objective historians."[11] Marx himself tried to grasp these two opposed interpretations – necessity and contingency, determinism and voluntarism – critically, as a dialectical antinomy that pointed beyond itself.

Because Fisher, following Deleuze and Badiou, elides bourgeois society, he elides the basis of not only the working-class movement for Socialism, but its critical self-consciousness in Marxism. As Lukacs put it: "because [the proletariat's] practical goal is the fundamental transformation of the whole of society it conceives of bourgeois society together with its intellectual and artistic productions as the point of departure for its own method."[12] But for Fisher there is no bourgeois society and so there is no point of departure for proletarian class consciousness. We are left with "mere contingency." Fisher is forced to find some kind of outside: Badiou's communist invariant, or "love and freedom," or as we will see later, "acid communism." Marx saw the proletarian class struggle as the symptom of the self-contradiction of bourgeois society in which right met right, i.e. the equal rights of capital and labor. Capitalism is an historically unprecedented problem of "social domination." For Fisher, on the other hand, the class struggle is the transhistorical struggle of the oppressed versus the oppressors, or "human beings who want to move in the direction of love and freedom" versus the "Grey Anglo-Saxon Protestant capitalist sorcerers" (as he puts it later in "Democracy is Joy").

The liquidation of bourgeois society from Marx's account, thus leading to the embrace of "mere contingency" (and its counterpart, determinism), and the rejection of subjectivity, is the basis on which Fisher accepts the neoliberal framework, merely inverting its values. The Badiouian-Deleuzian account of capitalism Fisher builds on is compelling to him because it confirms his one-sided anti-neoliberalism, in which Adam Smith is thrown under the bus, because we all hate Thatcher, and we can will TINA away by declaring capitalism to be "mere contingency." For example, the rejection of subjectivity in order to go against supposed neoliberal "individualism," instead embracing "collectivity" or "community" remains within the neoliberal framework. As Gillian Rose wrote in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, diagnosing the early 1990s, the period of Fisher's intellectual formation in the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, "We have given up communism – only to fall more deeply in love with the idea of 'the community.'"[13] "Neoliberalism" did not depend just on "individualism" but a fetishization of "the community"; they formed an antinomy, neither term of which grasped society.

Fisher's liquidation of Marxism by eliding bourgeois society from the theory of history is a symptom of a common trend on the Left, and not just in recent decades. It goes back to the Old Left, from "vulgar Marxism," which neglected the question of subjectivity in favor of a positive ethic of "communism," to Heidegger, who similarly dismisses the problems of bourgeois subjectivity as "western metaphysics."[14] The New Left, too, rejected bourgeois society as the starting point of the proletariat's method. As Susan Sontag famously argued, parliamentary government, the emancipation of women, Kant and Marx all couldn't redeem "Western white civilization," the "cancer of human history," which simply "eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads." This account of the eradication of autonomous civilizations sounds very similar to Fisher's account of history, in which capitalism is the destruction of "lifeworlds" by "Grey Anglo-Saxon Protestant capitalist sorcerers."

It is for these reasons that the structure Fisher erected was susceptible to the shockwaves of 2016. Fisher's theory of capitalism and the critique of the Left that he develops from it are premised on (anti-) neoliberalism to such an extent that the crisis of neoliberalism melted away his earlier circumspection. While *Capitalist Realism* ends with a call for a "Marxist Supernanny" to discipline the Left out of its pathological state, this return to Marx owed more to Badiou and Deleuze, and compounded the long-standing liquidation of Marxism. This collapse took form in two main shifts in Fisher's thought: his shift from a critique of the 60s New Left to an embrace of the counterculture as "acid communism," and his shift from a critique of (neo-) social democracy to Corbynism.

While Fisher was once skeptical of changes to neoliberalism signaling the end of "capitalist realism," because he knew how the Left had been wrong-footed by changes in capitalism before, in the 2015 UK general election, he embraced a weak form of social democracy as a way out of neoliberalism. The durée of neoliberalism has been so unbearable that the signs of cracks were overwhelming. As he wrote of the TV election debates: "capitalist realism is so deeply embedded that it was hard not to feel a frisson when, for instance, [Leanne] Wood [of Plaid Cymru] defended trade unions and the welfare state.... Here is one picture of a post-neoliberal UK: a soft left regaining its confidence on the one hand, a glowering far right on the other, nothing where the capitalist realist "middle" used to be."[15]

He still sees the alternatives for post-neoliberalism, as he did in 2009, to be a soft-left social democracy or an authoritarian right, but in capitulating to the former, he forgets his earlier claim that such a change within capitalism would perpetuate "capitalist realism," not to mention the New Left's critique of the welfare state or the earlier observation of the Frankfurt School that the Fordist welfare state *was* the authoritarian state. It is instructive to note that this shift in his thought happens before Jeremy Corbyn arrived on the scene after the 2015 election. Corbyn is not an "accident of history," as the *Weekly Worker* often argues;[16] he is a symptom and not the cause of a revamped social democracy on the Left, which might well have unfolded similarly without him. Indeed, this can be traced back to Obama's calls for a new New Deal in 2008, now rebooted as Millennial "Socialism."

The return to social democracy is prepared by Fisher's anti-neoliberalism, which idealizes the condition of left-wing politics in the post-war era of the Fordist welfare state. During this time, Fisher became close to the self-described "anti-authoritarian communist" activist group Plan C. They too, in 2015, as now, were willing to endorse what they called "plan B" – i.e. social democracy as opposed to plan A (austerity) and plan C (communism). As Fisher wrote in 2015: "[I]t's perfectly plausible that a Labour-SNP coalition could now achieve what Jeremy Gilbert and I argue that New Labour could have been expected to attempt: "make some efforts to change the strategic situation in the long-term: to rebuild the unions, to re-energize local government, to facilitate the growth of an alternative media sector..." [the] Blairites... are as out of date now as Blair argued "Old Labour" was in 1997."[17] The crisis of the Labour party in recent times offers the chance for the fulfillment of what Blair had promised but not fulfilled, not only for Millennials, but despairing Gen X leftists.

One suspects, as Fisher did of the 90s "anti-capitalist" left, that their "actual aim [is] not to replace capitalism but to mitigate its worst excesses." Certainly, as Fisher predicted in *Capitalist Realism*, this lowering of horizons will mean that "capitalist realism" as a pathology of the Left will outlast the neoliberal era. A further sign of this "deflationary consciousness" (Fisher's phrase for the Left's "morose conservatism" masked by passionate activism) is the self-delusion that even if the Left is defeated, the tide is nonetheless turning in its favor. As Fisher put it in a public lecture in 2016, "Corbyn might be crushed, but I think we can be confident... there wouldn't have been Corbyn without Syriza... there is a new wave and we can now start to ride it towards post-capitalism."[18] The certain prospect of a "capitalist realist" post-neoliberal capitalism, even under a Corbyn government, is blotted out.

Perhaps to combat this form of "deflationary consciousness," Fisher turned to forms of "consciousness raising" salvaged from the 60s-70s New Left under the rubric of "acid communism," the title of the book he was planning at the time of his suicide. Whereas in 2009, "capitalist realism" was "a pathology of the Left" that developed as a consequence of a bad repetition of the 60s, with *Acid Communism* Fisher began to focus on neoliberalism as a strategy of the Right to destroy the 60s-70s experiments in "democratic Socialism" and "consciousness raising." "We must

"Forgetting Mark Fisher" continues below

"Capitalist body", cont. from page 3

implies a lack of boundaries between labor and leisure; the melding of culture and capitalism. As Lazzarato says, "life becomes inseparable from work [...] capitalist production has invaded our lives and has broken down all the oppositions among economy, power, and knowledge."[22] Without a moment for rest or recuperation from the bombardment of capitalism's nasty side effects, it is no wonder that Global Economy is experiencing a debilitating physical and mental collapse.

It is unfortunate that in the ten years since Gilligan's films were created, capitalist economies have suffered further distress. In fact, the side effects of neoliberal capitalism have intensified, due in part to a continuation of the same high-risk economic practices that led to the 2008 crisis, and in part to world-wide elections that have placed neoliberal figureheads like Donald Trump and Theresa May in political office. In this new reality, not only is Global Economy ill, but the "psychiatrists" who are responsible for aiding in recovery, have been replaced by capitalist CEO's and by their champions who are unable and unwilling to acknowledge the disease in the first place. While Gilligan created an allegorical work urging witnesses of the 2008 financial crash to seek new economic alternatives, today's embrace of neoliberal political leaders is symptomatic of a global society blind to capitalism's terminally ill framework. How then do we imagine new futures where the health of our global economy is not reliant on a value-based society?| **P**

1 Ramirez, Steven A. *Lawless capitalism.* New York, 2013, 181-182.
2 In his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey defines the term Neoliberalism. He writes, "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices." See: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford, 2005.
3 Charlesworth, JJ. "Crisis at the ICA: Ekow Eshun's Experiment in Deinstitutionalisation | Mute." Metamute.org, 2010.
4 Ibid.
5 Bishop, Claire. *Artificial hells*. London, 2012, 219-226.
6 Karl Marx. "Grundrisse: Notebook VII – The Chapter on Capital." Marxists.org, 2016.
7 Gilligan, Melanie. 2009. *Self-Capital*. Video, (episode 1). 27 minutes. Franco Soffiantino Contemporary Art Productions, Milan.
8 Cazdyn, *The already dead*. Durham, 2012.
9 Gilligan, *Self-Capital* (episode 1).
10 Srnicek, Nick. *Inventing the future*. London, 2015.
11 Gilligan, *Self-Capital* (episode 1).
12 Gilligan, Melanie. "Affect & Exchange," *Fillip*, 2012.
13 Ibid.
14 Lazzarato, Maurizio. "Immaterial Labor." *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, 1996, 132,3-146,7.
15 Hardt, Michael. "Affective Labor." *boundary 2*, 2: Summer, 1999, 89-100.
16 Ibid.
17 Gilligan, *Self-Capital* (episode 1).
18 Ibid.
19 Cazdyn, *The already dead.*
20 I am using the phrase 'mises en abyme' as it is referenced in Sharon Mounanda's essay "'Mises en abyme' and Narrative Function in Zola's 'La Curée.'" To draw her own argument using the term, the author borrows from Dällenbach, stating, "this definition encompasses not just narratives within the narrative but any entity which reflects, wholly or in part, the content, the structure, or the writing process." See: Sharon Mouanda, "'Mises en abyme' and Narrative Function in Zola's 'La Curée'", Modern Humanities Research Association, 103: 1, 2008, 35-45.
21 Gilligan, *Self-Capital* (episode 3).
22 Lazzarato, Maurizio. "Immaterial Labor." *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, 1996, 132,3-146,7.

"Forgetting Mark Fisher", cont. from page 4

regain the optimism of that seventies moment."[19]

This is a remarkable reversal of his earlier position. Against the thesis of Adam Curtis' documentary *Hypernormalisation* (BBC, 2016), which Fisher once shared, that the counterculture led to neoliberalism, Fisher begins to argue that "the failure of the left after the 60s had much [more] to do with its repudiation of, or refusal to engage with, the dreamings that the counterculture unleashed."[20] It is interesting to note that the name "acid communism" came to Fisher when he heard the actor David Tennant describe the New Left psychologist R.D. Laing as "the acid Marxist." Fisher changed this to "acid communism," completing his affinity to Badiou's "communist hypothesis." In the crisis of neoliberalism it seems the Left will not recover Marxism's negativity, but the supposed "positivity" of "communism." Presumably the acid is there so that we realize that everything is "mere contingency."

In the crisis of neoliberalism this return to the New Left goes hand in hand with a return to the Old Left: the return to Labourism and social democracy, as well as to a nostalgia for Stalinist Communist Parties.[21] In the crisis of neoliberalism the Left is trying to belatedly put the 20th century back together again, as if the political disputes on the Left had never happened. Fisher sought a return to the cultural revolution of the New Left, but without the destruction of the welfare state – wishing for the Blair that never was. Fisher wanted the old and the new. As he wrote in 2014, "We don't have to choose between class politics and anti-authoritarianism any more than we need to choose between Gramsci, Deleuze, and Guattari."[22]

This sentiment was also expressed in the editorial to the recently revived *Tribune* magazine, a relic of the Labour Left, which this January featured Mark Fisher.[23] The editorial to the first issue, titled "The Old and the New,"[24] affirmatively quotes Michael Foot: "The old dogmas are as good as ever." But putting the Old and the New Left back together again in this way is not an act of remembering but an act of forgetting: forgetting that the old Labour Left, which the Stalinist Communist Party supported, was never about overcoming capitalism, but as Fisher puts it, "mitigat[ing] its worst excesses"; forgetting that the New Left ever broke with the Old Left and opposed the welfare state; forgetting the critique of the New Left's abandonment of politics for the gesture of oppositional culture; forgetting what is sore about the past, because it has not been overcome.

Fisher was well aware of this type of forgetting. In *Capitalist Realism* he described how "forgetting becomes an adaptive strategy": by "editing out the point of suture," we can accept "the incommensurable" (56). The Left participates in this forgetting to convince itself that "there is a new wave and we can now start to ride it towards post-capitalism." The collapsing of the Millennial Left in to the Labour party has reconciled the previously incommensurable by adding the Old and the New together and lowering their horizons, compelled by a fear of the 'new', which is inevitably coming from the Right. But as Fisher put it a decade ago, "resistance to the 'new' is not a cause that the Left can or should rally around" (28). To read Mark Fisher against the grain would mean to re-expose the sutures in the history of the Left, to expose what is still sore.| **P**

1 CCI Collective, "All of this is temporary," <https://youtu.be/deZgzw0YHQI>
2 "Preoccupying: Mark Fisher." *The Occupied Times*, May 3, 2012. <https://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=3454>
3 CCI Collective, "All of this is temporary."
4 Published in the new anthology, *K-Punk*.
5 Land, Nick. "Acceleration." *Urban Future (2.1)*. <http://www.ufblog.net/acceleration/>
6 At least Land is up-front in telling us that this substitution would alter Marx and Engels' argument. Fisher slips it in without telling us, using those square brackets, without any recognition that it might significantly alter the point. I am sure Land was aware that Fisher had already "upgraded" poor old Marx and Engels in this way. Land is just more explicit about the stakes of such a move. The virtue of Land's paltry "neo-reactionary" "right" accelerationism is that it need not obfuscate by claiming Marx, as Fisher does as a "left" accelerationist, but can be clearer about the consequences of their shared Deleuzian philosophy.
7 Cutrone, Chris. "The Marxist hypothesis." *Platypus Review*, November 6, 2010. <https://platypus1917.org/2010/11/06/the-marxist-hypothesis-a-response-to-alain-badous-communist-hypothesis/>
8 Ironically, this reproduces exactly what Fisher and other "accelerationists" claimed to oppose in the '90s anti-globalization Left. As we will see, they form two complementary fragments of the fall-out of the New Left.
9 Fisher, Mark. "Democracy is Joy." July 13, 2015. <http://k-punk.org/democracy-is-joy>
10 Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Bk 1, Ch 4.
11 1869 preface to *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.
12 Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat."
13 Rose, Gillian. "Athens and Jerusalem: a tale of three cities," *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 1996.
14 Fisher's dismissal of the bourgeois revolutionary transformation of the world as "the greatest theocratic achievement in a history that was never human," has a certain Heideggerian ring to it.
15 Fisher, Mark. "Limbo is over." April 26, 2015. <https://k-punk.org/limbo-is-over/>
16 Ford, Eddie. "Firing the first shots." *Weekly Worker*, September 17, 2015. <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1074/firing-the-first-shots/>
17 <https://k-punk.org/limbo-is-over/>
18 CCI Collective, "All of this is temporary."
19 *K-Punk*, p. 770
20 *K-Punk*, p. 756
21As was in evidence in Jodi Dean's lecture, "Capitalism is the end of world," *The Mark Fisher Memorial Lecture 2019*. <https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=12106>
22 Fisher, Mark. "For now, our desire is nameless." *The European*, May 20, 2014. <https://www.theeuropean-magazine.com/mark-fisher--2/8480-is-there-an-alternative-to-capitalism>
23 Braithwaite, Phoebe. "Mark Fisher's Popular Modernism." *Tribune*, January 18, 2019. <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2019/01/mark-fisher-kpunk-popular-modernism>
24 Burtenshaw, Ronan. "The Old and the New." *Tribune*, November 26, 2018. <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2018/11/the-old-and-the-new>

The capitalist body in perpetual recovery in Melanie Gilligan's *Self-Capital*

Max Fields

IN LATE 2008 AND EARLY 2009, the world's financial markets collapsed under the immeasurable weight of unregulated speculative market practices in relation to subprime lending, debt accumulation, and the monopoly of finance capitalism. Labeled "The Great Financial Crisis," the collapse led to the loss of $7.4 trillion in stock wealth in the U.S., alone. The response to the financial crash arrived in the form of a series of massive government interventions that attempted to offset the consequences of the overarching failures of neoliberalism. Through the implementation of wide-sweeping austerity measures, executed by federal governments from the U.K. to the U.S., the financial burden for the recovery was shifted to the backs of ordinary citizens, while the banking sector, which had both recklessly driven speculation and prospered enormously from it, went largely unscathed in the aftermath of the market's collapse. In fact, life-saving bailouts were arranged for the perpetrators of the financial risk-taking that had left many worldwide homeless and jobless. In his essay "Lawless Capitalism," economist Steven A. Ramirez outlines the lack of punitive measures imposed on the U.S. financial sector and predicts the subsequent catastrophic fallout for the global economy. He writes,

> The stock market crashed to new lows in March and then marched back rapidly thereafter. Combined with all their subsidies, the market volatility paid off handsomely for the banking elite. In the first half of 2009, Goldman Sachs set aside $ 11.4 billion for bonuses, or the equivalent of $750,000 per annum per employee. This return to business as usual, with the U.S. taxpayer subsidizing the risks of the financial sector, threatens more market instability into the future, as the financial sector seems certain to pursue ever more risk. This cannot be termed capitalism– instead it constitutes a corrupted economic system rigged at the top for elite enrichment only.[1]

While Wall Street had been exercising damaging financial practices for decades, it was the ruinous brew of loose regulation and sub-servitude on the part governments internationally that brought about the cataclysmic events of 2008, when the majority of the global populace began to feel the impact of this system. Governments, worldwide, had allowed for the creation of a neoliberal construction of capitalism; wherein the production of fiscal instability and destruction is rewarded, the taxpayer bailout of irresponsible financial institutions is lauded, and the boom and bust cycle is considered a natural phenomenon.[2] It was within the context of this global financial disaster that Melanie Gilligan's three-episode film *Self-Capital* was created.

In this work, Gilligan delivered sharp criticisms of "The Great Financial Crisis," firing back on sociopolitical events in real-time, calling attention to the unregulated and unstoppable forces of both public and private structures of power that nurtured the large-scale economic crisis. Created in 2009, *Self-Capital* explores the complex interactions that connect bio-power and imposing neoliberal capitalist structures with the ill, but recovering, social body. Throughout each of the three episodes viewers follow a personified Global Economy, portrayed by actress Penelope McGhie, as she struggles to work through a series of prescribed body-oriented techniques and exercises. Throughout the course of these therapeutic practices, Global Economy attempts to revive her depleted ego and energy, while reconstructing her ideological trust and confidence, lost after suffering a complete and utter meltdown. Giving a singular human form to the abstract body of global labor, Gilligan simultaneously represents global socioeconomic and political oppression's affect on the individual and the much larger social body. She takes this strategy of physical embodiment a step further by casting McGhie for all roles throughout the *Self-Capital* series. The actress appears in the films as two therapists, their subject, a receptionist, and a bookstore cashier. This singular casting of roles, wherein Global Economy sees her image everywhere through a mirror of the total labor force she represents, articulates the ineffectiveness of self-regulation and self-care within neoliberal market-based economies. Gilligan grounds her arguments against the neoliberal framework of capitalism through an examination of Marxist terminology and practice, giving form to the cyclical nature of capitalism described in contemporary Marxist writing. Her work investigates the role of self-care and health management in relation to the individual and society, unregulated financial networks, and the emergence of immaterial labor. She effectively creates a context through which failure can be understood as a constant threat to *and* perpetuating symptom of a value-based society.

Before discussing specific conceptual and theoretical aspects explored within the work itself, it is important to understand the framework within which the film was made. The events surrounding the production of *Self-Capital* serve as a critical lens through which to understand the work. The video not only as an exploration of capitalism's failure in the world-at-large, but also as one produced within the context of a state-sponsored arts institution that was, in light of austerity measures and the world-wide financial crisis, suffering from its own financial crisis at the time. Acting-Director Ekow Eshun, of the Institute of Contemporary Art, London (ICA, London), where Gilligan was in residence, explained the institution's financial hardships were a "perfect storm" and a "force of nature" stemming from a lack of development department fundraising, a lack of income provided by the Institute's film distribution arm, and the overarching impact of a financial crisis that was dissuading corporate sponsorships of programs and exhibitions. "Staff members have been told that a financial deficit currently around £600,000 might rise to £1.2 million and if radical steps are not taken the ICA could be closed by May [...] a third of its full-time staff of "around 60" would be in line for redundancy."[3] Eshun's diagnosis of the ICA's financial struggle is, in and of itself, an example of how the heads of institutions evade responsibility by deflecting managerial responsibility to outside departments and financial conditions. In his statements Eshun strategically avoided discussing the failed financial strategies that he designed, such as the abolishment of day membership fees (a total loss estimated at £120,000) and a fundraising platform based-on the acquisition of corporate sponsorships for exhibitions, programs, and educational outreach. In essence, Eshun's high-risk strategy for his public institution mirrored that of corporate institutions.[4]

The degree to which the financial problems of the institution influenced Gilligan's work is readily apparent through her decision to use the ICA, London as the sole location and backdrop for each scene in the video triptych. Gilligan doesn't hide the building's institutional signifiers or attempt to take us out of the reality within which the film was made. In the series' opening scenes, Gilligan introduces viewers to Global Economy's failed psychiatrist, one of actor Penelope McGhie's four characters. Through narration we learn that the psychiatrist is writing a recommendation for treatment to her college on behalf of the patient's illness. The location of the scene is a clichéd therapist's office, decorated like a saturated 90s telenovela, complete with pink mood lighting accenting shadows within the frame. After a quick cut, and while the psychiatrist's narration continues, Global Economy makes her first appearance in the work. She opens a door plastered with large white lettering that spells out "FREE ENTRY UNTIL 11PM – TWO GALLERIES." Soon after, she walks past what is the unmistakable sight of the ICA's gift shop and lobby. Gilligan's presupposed technique, to make apparent the film's place in reality and to eliminate the opportunity for the audience's suspension of disbelief by masking the ICA's environment, provides space for the film to span dual temporal realities, blurring the line between real and imagined space in real time. In fact, the only foreign body in the frame that is not grounded by the outside reality is professional actor Penelope McGhie, who has been brought in from the outside to perform the role of society. Her roles are the only aspect of the videos that require a suspension of belief at any level. Although McGhie's cast of characters are outside agents in an otherwise authentic portrayal of the ICA and outside world, the act of being cast by Melanie Gilligan can be considered as a parallel to the ICA's own actions during the institution's financial breakdown. Director Eshun's museum crisis management project, *The Reading Group,* consisted of invited professional artists, critics, and intellectuals performing the role of a much larger arts community working to revitalize and reimagine the Museum from within its own structure. It is through this lens that McGhie's participation in *Self-Capital* becomes a form of delegated performance; a term coined by art-historian and critic Claire Bishop in her 2012 publication *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.*

Bishop defines delegated performance as, "the act of hiring non-professionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his/her instructions [...] Depending on the mode of filming, these situations can trouble the border between live and mediated to the point where audiences are unsure of the degree to which an event has been staged or scripted."[5] While perhaps filmmaking as a whole can be articulated through terms that delineate all film production processes as delegated and mediated procedures, Bishop's analysis situates the act of delegated performance as that which moves in and out of temporal realities in such a manner that viewers are unable to distinguish between truth and fiction. The timing of the production of *Self-Capital* along with Gilligan's sense of immediacy creates this situation by default, where in the actor's various roles are unable to become mere symbolic gestures, but instead reflect the very real conditions being undertaken by the hosting institution. The hiring of a professional actor to perform artistic imagining – with regards to both *The Reading Group* and in *Self-Capital* – underpins and allows for a microcosmic 'push and pull' relationship between the video, the ICA, London's financial instability, and the greater global economic crisis outside. Try as the viewer might to disentangle the reality of *Self-Capital's* institutional setting and situation, the fact remains, the institution *is* suffering from a meltdown, the market collapse is one aspect of that problem, and those realities are embedded within the video's frame and the work's 'fictional' narrative.

This reflexive analysis between the ICA's institutional financial disasters and the subject of Gilligan's *Self-Capital*, the failure of capitalist structures, can be further examined by critiquing the nature of capitalism in relation to self-care and internal management procedures designed and implemented as safeguards against large-scale catastrophe. The execution of self-care procedures and management arises out of the cannibalistic aspects of capitalism best described by Karl Marx in his essay *The Fragment on Machines.* He writes,

> Capital which consumes itself in the production process, or fixed capital, is the means of production in the strict sense. In a broader sense the entire production process and each of its moments, such as circulation [...] is only a means of production for capital, for which value alone is the end in itself. Regarded as a physical substance, the raw material itself is a means of production for the product etc. But the determination that the use value of fixed capital is that which eats itself up in the production process is identical to the proposition that it is used in this process only as a means, and itself exists merely as an agency for the transformation of the raw material into the product.[6]

Marx outlines the cyclical nature of capitalism by describing the contemporary production of value as a structure that imagines its internal subjects as raw material that produce not only output value, but also create intrinsic value in and of themselves. To complicate Marx's statement further, a leap from raw material to human subjects demonstrates the physical and mental demands placed on Global Economy and the workers that are represented as her body. Unlike machines, which never cease production, the human subject (raw material) must take breaks, rest, or otherwise run the risk of exhaustion or death. In *Self-Capital*, it is Global Economy itself/herself that is exhausted and is suffering from the side effects of a machinic capitalist production gone too far, too long without regulatory measures in place to avoid an internal collapse from external demands. While under hypnosis, Global Economy describes the ballooning demand to produce capital at the expense of the health of the capitalist structure itself. Unconscious, she imagines herself in the ICA cinema crying out, "The body was in very good shape, but it ran itself down. It pushed things too far, now the body must regulate itself, reproduce its productive energies better. There were no limits, but we found limits. Now we will juggle the limits!"[7] Not only is Global Economy suffering from the demands of production, but also in a time of complete and utter crisis, she is tasked with reregulating her own body, doing so only to resume outputting capital through the same self-destructive channels that led to her current breakdown. This self-sabotage through the simultaneous acknowledgement of newly discovered sociopolitical economic limitations and implied desire to reconfigure oneself in such a way as to surpass and juggle limitations for the sake of capitalist production, creates the cycle described most commonly as "boom to bust" economics. In his text, *The Already Dead*, theorist Eric Cazdyn describes boom to bust as capitalism's chronic illness, that is, an illness that is never resolved, but is present even when the system appears to function well. In his book he describes this illness as having a parasitic relationship to the very nature of a fully functioning capitalist structure. He writes, "This crisis constitutes the system itself; the system cannot function without its internal crisis [...] Crisis is not what happens when we go wrong; crisis is what happens when we go right." Cadzyn continues, "Crisis is not what happens when capitalism goes wrong, but when it goes right."[8] He calls this structural condition "the New Chronic," a system that exists only by enforcing regulatory measures for the sake of self-maintenance to freeze present structural conditions. Tasked with providing her own self- care, Global Economy has sought out professional council, undergoing numerous treatments, all of which have unsurprisingly fallen short of relieving the damaging effects of the current economic crisis.

Throughout each episode, Global Economy attempts to quell the symptoms of chronic illness that stem from an onslaught of extreme capitalist demands that are taking a toll on her physical body and mental facilities. The unorthodox treatments include partaking in regimented body-oriented exercises ranging from hypnosis, free-form yogic actions, and intensely introspective vocal therapy sessions. These therapeutic actions are prescribed to Global Economy as a form of self-care. For example, in Episode 1, Global Economy sits opposite of her newly appointed alt-therapist who initiates the session by announcing a continuous stream of vague statements in a soothing and calm manner, inducing a trance-like reaction from her subject. In her monotone voice, the doctor begins,

> I am speaking Economy, you are lying back and relaxing. No need to think of anything, or to think of anything you might be thinking of, such as the changing focus of your eyes, certain phenomena of life [...] Your mind is not thinking with your mind. Your mind might only want to sit there, not moving, no need for it to move, no need to go there, when going there would mean going somewhere, when you prefer to go nowhere...If you know how to go to work, the way a busy bee knows how to be in an advanced society, you can find a way to move a body. Your body is spreading out into the sunshine. You're spreading body can leave your body to the next one who needs a body.[9]

These passive yet self-reflexive sentences instruct Global Economy to weave in and out of conscious realities to temporarily separate the mind from body. The introspective diagnosis only begins after Global Economy has fallen under the spell of her doctor, provoking Global Economy to reveal the true nature of her breakdown as if no one else (the body) was listening. McGhie's corporeal embodiment of the abstract large social body through her portrayal of Global Economy lends physical form to the usually private and opaque methods of structural maintenance and stabilization that are enacted throughout the total scope of capitalist society. Her identification of the symptoms of a larger problem cannot be addressed in a public forum and therefore the risk of another collapse is maintained. In this way, Global Economy only attempts to treat her symptoms through this practice, opting to remain forever ill and forever under the thumb of capitalist demands. McGhie's representation of self-care health management is two-fold. She at once depicts a fledgling social body made up of many individual sick components struggling to work through an oppressive capitalist structure and mimics the performance of an actual person working toward recovery after suffering from a totalizing physical and mental collapse. By extending the representation of an ill social body into the physical realm of the subjects that collectively characterize the tired, overworked, and unhealthy global labor force, Gilligan highlights how the total structure is ill, as well as the individuals working within it. And in neoliberal capitalism, both the society and its individual constituents are expected to care for their own health. This begs the question, what happens when the scope of the illness exceeds the effectiveness of self-care management in times of crisis? What happens when these limits are breached?

Having worked herself to the extreme limit of neoliberal capitalism's unregulated markets, Global Economy is forced to endure the responsibility of an efficient recovery with the expectation of resuming work as a reinvigorated and productive socioeconomic system. The excess of social and physical labor imposed on the body demands that Global Economy be forever locked in a state of self-improvement; remain refreshed, and highly efficient. This demand is driven by the stress of neoliberal capitalism and its subjects to be a constantly competitive force, operating at a maximum level, at all times, even at the expense of self-immolation. In their book *Inventing the Future*, theorists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams describe the conditions for constant training and self-improvement. They write, "We are constructed as competitive subjects – a role that encompasses and surpasses industrial capitalism's productive subject. The imperatives of neoliberalism drive these subjects to constant self-improvement in every aspect of their lives. [...] One's personal life is as bound to competition as one's work life. Under these conditions, it is no surprise that anxiety proliferates in contemporary societies."[10] Global Economy's stress, according to Srnicek and Williams is a natural phenomenon of neoliberalism.

The threat of failure, although constant, is the disciplinary measure that provides the societal drive to be constantly improving oneself. Gilligan best represents the pressures of work performance anxiety in a manic scene wherein Global Economy partakes in a therapeutic exercise that focuses on her ability to function within the socioeconomic context of consumer to cashier exchange. Shot in the ICA's gift shop, Global Economy stands face-to-face with the museum cashier and initiates a series of confused transactions that fail to be comprehensible at times by either the buyer or seller. The purchases by Global Economy are small – books, magazines, DVD's – but the value of each object and the structure that dictate those values are obscured and nonsensical. Nonetheless, the transactions continue at a rapid pace until eventually the buyer and seller switch their places and subsume their roles, with Global Economy moving behind the cashier's desk and the cashier now making purchases. Gilligan uses the switch to draw attention to the lack of division between labor and leisure. She illuminates how the boundaries between the two states of being within a neoliberal capitalist framework are blurred, demonstrating that often there is not a clear distinction to be made. At the conclusion of the scene and episode, the cashier-turned-consumer explains to a confused Global Economy that neoliberal capitalism is a cyclical framework with very clear objectives. Their conversation begins with Global Economy's question, "*So now?* You must work. *And then?* Then you eat. *Then?* Then you sleep. *And?* Then you work. *And then?* Reproduce. *Oh, and then what?* Do it again, but...*but what?* Get paid less. *Ah...*"[11] What is not described in the cashier's description of the routine of work/life labor is the maintenance of the subject once exhausted. It is inherent that a subject of neoliberalism will provide its own self-care while under the pressure to produce. Outside of sleeping and eating, the absence of care reinforces neoliberal capitalism's indifference to subject preservation. There can be no separation between work and life if one is to remain competitive and working, and one cannot be adequately productive if one is ill. Reproduction guarantees the labor force is constantly replenished.

In a neoliberal construction of capitalism, the reproduction of workers is maintained and supported by biopolitical state functions, or as Gilligan describes, "forms of governance [that] aim to maintain the functioning of the social body within a relatively homeostatic range through pre-emptive regulatory actions aimed at averting forecasted dangers."[12] In *Self-Capital*, however, the responsibilities of the state are in question and have failed under the weight of shifting economic practices. In her essay "Affect and Exchange," Gilligan describes the focus of her artistic practice as, "representing systemic economic shifts while contrasting them with their affective impact on people."[13] The economic shifts represented in *Self-Capital* mirror the contemporary transformation of a global economy that was previously reliant on factory labor models of production (modernization) as the means of its capitalist proliferation into the construction of an evolved labor economy which exists outside of a Fordist construction of capitalism. Within this post-Fordist construction of capitalism, the labor force is focused less on the production of material products and durable goods in order to delineate value. Instead, the production and management of knowledge, information, data, services, and expanded networks of communication are the primary means through which capital is both defined and accrued. In 1997, sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato coined the term 'immaterial labor' to describe this emerging form of work. He defines immaterial labor as,

> Labor that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity. The concept of *immaterial labor* refers to two different aspects of labor. On the one hand, as regards the "information content" of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control [...] On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the "cultural content" of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work" – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.[14]

According to Lazzarato, the transformation from a post-Fordist society, in which the workforce is simply subjected to the coordination of capitalist operations, occurs when workers are "expected to become 'active subjects' in the coordination of the various functions of production." Three of McGhie's portrayed characters in *Self-Capital* can be considered metaphorical representatives of 'active subjects' operating within the contemporary global labor-force. As Global Economy, McGhie personifies both the neoliberal capitalist framework within which immaterial labor is becoming the prominent means of production *and* a subject operating within immaterial labor's structure. As such, the role positions the global economic force as a subject under the control of the very procedures that it produces. As Global Economy is struggling to come to grips with the implications of a dynamic labor force that operates using highly-specialized language and

"Capitalist body" continues on page 3